



The Research of Tourism Markets, Learning During Tourism Studies and Using in Practice

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a remarkable economic sector, one of the most profitable economic sectors in many countries. In Latvia tourism is a comparatively new sector. Only during the last decade the majority of society is starting to acknowledge tourism as a considerable sector, as in the past it was considered just a hobby of individuals. During author's tourism business studies it was challenging to compare the situation in foreign countries with the situation in Latvia and to find out what factors have created it – long years in USSR, Latvian mentality, the climate or something else. The present article is devoted to one of very significant factors – tourism market research. The authors Blaxter, Hughes and Tight admit that research makes re-evaluate practice, lets return to every step in the research process, depending on necessity [1]. According to Yates, research is always connected with the sphere and the situation, not only with the research object [7]. The author admits that tourism market studies are constantly taking place in Latvia but, unfortunately, not always they are professionally elaborated and cannot be used practically. This situation can be explained – new tourism specialists work mainly as waiters, hotel administrators, tourism agents. Higher level office is held by aged people who have studied completely different professions because tourism studies were not offered during their study time. As the author has observed working as a lecturer in a tourism study program, the most profound researches in tourism field are done by students who are working on their diploma papers during the 4th study year. According to Garleja and Kangro, student's research skills depend on his/her ability to use acquired knowledge, to reason logically, to evaluate, to select information, to analyze, to weigh alternatives and to orientate oneself in nonstandard situations [4].

This topic is chosen for one main reason. Working with tourism program students the author has observed that very often students' researches remain without practical application. Every researcher has to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in order to do a research with relevant results. Basic skills can be acquired already in secondary schools but during university studies the most important is to get knowledge and skills that refer to a specific area. Research process is not linear; it is interactive [2]. School of Business Administration Turība offers bachelor's study program where students master research basics in the study course "Introduction to Tourism". In addition, in master's study program students acquire the course called "Tourism Research Methods". Each study year ends with practice, and students write a research joining their theoretical knowledge with practice. The author wishes to find out the ways how to improve students' research quality and to ensure that the results of these researches are taken into account in daily work of tourism companies. This research is closely related to the author's dissertation which focuses on development of tourism students' competence.

The aim of the present research is to give theoretical background of tourism research specifics and to evaluate successful integration of the research results into practice.

The practical part of the present research is done in the beginning of this year but in general observations and cognitions on the topic have been gathered for more than 10 years, since the author has started tourism studies and pedagogical work in a higher educational establishment.

2. Methods and procedure

In order to carry out the present research the author has analyzed different literature sources, both specialized tourism literature and other publications. Specific features of tourism market and factors that influence the quality of a research have been characterized, and practical research is done whose results are integrated into practice. The information is gained in the course of empirical research, visits to tourism companies, studies in tourism programs and practical work. The questionnaire with open and closed questions is used. The questionnaire is realized in a small restaurant in Riga which specializes in Latvian traditional dishes. The respondents are 50 British tourists. These respondents were chosen because according to the restaurant administration, they make an important client segment, and for this reason it is important to analyze exactly their needs and habits. The author also organized interviews with the director of the restaurant and other specialists in tourism sector. After these interviews the author was convinced that greater attention should be paid to research in tourism sphere.

3. Research findings

Tourism market can be examined from three angles: exploring potential options, researching real processes taking place in the market or evaluating an undertaking that has already taken place. Each of these can be extended, and the researcher must be aware of the type of the research done.

Concerning the first angle – exploration of potential options – the most important notions are preparation, capacity of enterprise and the existing tourism attractions. If attractions are not a part of the final result it will be difficult to create positive impressions for a tourist. If attractions are outstanding, the trip is sold successfully. A striking



example is "Zelta Rudens" (Golden Autumn) in the Gauja National Park. For some weeks in autumn in the park with outstanding scenery the leaves are colored in bright colors. Since this happens due to a sharp drop in temperature, it is hard to predict the exact dates and the weather conditions. The tourism product "Golden Autumn" is sold by many tourism agencies, and both people on the spot and foreigners make for the small town Sigulda. It is not hard to imagine how unpredictable can be such a trip. A tourist who has intended to spend the day enjoying the scenery and tranquil relaxation can occur in a completely different situation. Some reasons for this can be overloaded catering companies, noisy visitors, lack of accommodation. Pizam and Mansfeld also accent the fact that a tourism trip as a purchase is unique in several ways: a) it does not have tangible feedback in investments; b) expenses are much bigger compared to income; c) it is not spontaneous; d) these are expenses that include planning and money saving [6].

Examining already existing tourism service – a real process taking place in the market – there will be different accents. It is essential to explore the behavior of a tourist and a service offerer. It is possible to find out the level of tourists' satisfaction by exploring the processes in the tourism market. For this questionnaires about satisfaction with service are being widely used. Freijers suggests that when organizing client questionnaires it is advisable to use the five step approach: formulation of the problem, development of the research design, data output, data analysis, implementation of the results into practice [3]. Visitors' books, suggestion boxes or suggestion to express one's opinion orally are also used.

The analysis of the results after a trip has a relevant meaning. Although opinions in these researches may differ dramatically tourism employer must analyze them. It will be hard to convince tourists who are dissatisfied with service to repeat the trip. In this case it is essential to use well-structured questionnaires that give a possibility to reveal when and by what dissatisfaction was caused. As satisfaction with the trip can be called fulfillment of travel hopes too, it is preferable that a tourist can express his/her opinion later, not exactly in the last travel day. Freijers also admits that as a trip consists of different parts, an appropriate evaluation of separate services can be given only at the end of it [3].

The tourism company "Dzintara ceļš" (The Amber Way) was founded in 2000. Working with tourists, it was observed that there are not enough restaurants in Riga that offer Latvian national dishes. In 2004 there appeared the idea about the restaurant Taverna in Old Riga next to the ancient amber way. In 2009 the second restaurant Fish Taverna was opened, offering mainly traditional Latvian fish dishes.

Both restaurants mentioned above offer traditional Latvian dishes, besides they are served in an ancient way, namely, without modern cutlery, in candlelight, with ancient music accompaniment. However, drinks include the most approved foreign vine, cognac and whiskey.

As it was already mentioned, the present research involved British tourists. Some of the results are described below. 80% of British tourists do not want to wait for lunch more than 30 minutes. As to dinner, 66% of respondents consider that it must be served within 1 hour. 100% of respondents admitted that the quality of products in the restaurant corresponds to the price. Only 45% of respondents are ready to pay more than 23 euro per one person for one meal, and 25% are not ready to spend more than 11 euro. 64% of the tourists would better like to try something new from the national cuisine than to have a simple meal for the price corresponding to the quality. 78% of respondents choose beer instead of other drinks. 44% admit that they choose only main course. The British tourists have highly estimated the atmosphere and the interior, namely, 84% of respondents give 5 points and 10% give 4 points (in the scale of 5 points). None of the visitors has remained indifferent and no one has chosen the answer that the offer is "nothing special". Such evaluation is positive, especially if we take into consideration the fact that many catering companies offer their service exactly in the historical center Old Riga.

4. Discussion and conclusions

A tourism product is characterized by several features that must be taken into consideration when creating an offer and organizing market research. Tourism market can be explored in three phases: potential, process and post-service phase. A different approach is advisable in each phase and before starting the research the researcher must be aware of the phase of a definite object. Tourism services cannot be preserved and their quality can change due to different factors – the weather, human factor, changes in economic situation. Besides, evaluation of the service is always subjective. Owners of tourism business must invest funds to make clients' impression positive as far as possible and act adequately in case of complaints.

Kristapsone admits that the basis of observation is not so much the features that can be counted and measured but those which are characterized by qualitative differences, like personnel's attitude to a client [5]. That is why the quality of tourism products is highly influenced by personnel. Employees must be highly motivated and have perfect understanding about tourism business and service administration. Those who are fond of other people are the most successful in service industry because clients quickly see if one's business is nothing more than earnings.

The results of the present research are already used in practice. In addition to catering the restaurant offers educational and entertaining sideshows. Visitors can find information about all dishes in the menu. To ensure that the service is quick in all times of a day the number of employees was evaluated. The administration and the personnel of the restaurant make an effort to make sure that both native inhabitants and foreign tourists are willing to return in the restaurant and each time see something new and interesting.



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